

The Builder.

No. CCLXXVI.

SATURDAY, MAY 20, 1848.



ON all sides of us accumulate pamphlets, reports, speeches, letters, and suggestions, respecting the great and pressing question of sanitary improvement.

We should half fill our journal every week with communications on the subject of drainage alone, were we to insert all the readable letters upon it which we receive. Large drains versus small drains; new materials for drain pipes; construction of double sewers, one for the surface drainage, the other for the house; drainage of Westminster, and impeachment of the very rev. and sanitarial Dean for fever-giving; and abuse and defence of the City Commissioners of Sewers, are some of the especial matters treated of by our latest correspondents. As to the general subject, an allusion even to all that is said upon it throughout the kingdom is quite out of the question. And most gratifying it is to find this has taken such hold of the public mind that, midst the thrillingly exciting events of the day, revolutions more numerous, important, and wide-spreading than the world has before witnessed, it still holds its place, retains attention, and will, it may be reasonably hoped, be now properly dealt with. Every writer or speaker against the Ministerial Health Bill now before the legislature, begins his opposition by declaring his anxiety to obtain sanitarial improvement by proper means,—the necessity of rescuing large bodies of fellow-creatures from pestilence and filth. All say that some legislative interference is necessary, and all are beginning to admit the connection between dirt and immorality,—want of light and air and the prevalence of crime. It startles us now-a-days to hear any deny it, at least one in the educated classes. As, for example, Mr. Henry Drummond, who said the other night in the House it was idle to connect the moral condition of the people with the place in which they lived. What had malaria to do with education? and as to the connection of dirt and disease with ignorance and crime, "*Credat Judeus non ego*," exclaimed the learned and eloquent member. Whether he does or does not, however, not merely the Jew but the Christian also does believe it,—they cannot disbelieve it if they have looked at all into the matter,—it is a certain and established fact: as certain as that prejudice is the spider of the mind, and weaves its tangled and obstructing web over every opening through which light should enter.

The Bill has been opposed, in its details, in every stage, but is nevertheless making way, and will probably pass the Commons within a few days. There is a general unaffected sympathy, as Lord Morpeth has remarked, on the part of the majority of the House, with the real objects of the Bill, and this has enabled him to overcome the few objectors, who, taking advantage of the difficulties which manifestly beset the right disposal of the question, have endeavoured, by all the means in their power, to prevent its progress. Mr. Bright, in the course of the debate, justly remarked, "It must be clear to

every one that such a Bill on its first introduction must necessarily be very incomplete. If her Majesty's Ministers possessed the wisdom of a Solomon, it would be impossible for them to bring in a Bill consisting of upwards of 150 clauses, that would not require many amendments. All he asked was, that hon. gentlemen would come to the consideration of the Bill in the same spirit in which it was proposed. It was quite clear that there existed no wish on the part of the Government to force any objectionable clauses on the country. He believed that with care they might be able to produce an acceptable measure, but if hon. members pertinaciously adhered to points of no material importance, they would not only retard the measure, but add considerably to the difficulties which belonged inherently to the subject." This willingness on the part of Government to accept suggestions, was shewn by the abandonment of the paid commission, and the adoption of some alterations proposed by Mr. Henley, which materially lessen the objections urged against the Bill, on the ground of centralization,—a cry which has been raised against it, and is always, with good reason, strong with Englishmen. Lord Morpeth has said more than once, that his only desire is to promote some good practical measure, and that he cared for this a thousand-fold more than for any credit that might be supposed to attach to a positive adherence to an original proposition;—honour to him for the feeling.

As to taking away the power from the hands of local boards, he stated there were no less than 300 towns without any local act: and that where there was an act it was not intended to interfere with it by this Bill, without an order of council, coming under the knowledge of the House, and an Act of Parliament applying to the place in question. Where there was no such local act, the Queen, in council, was enabled to apply this Bill. The central board would not interfere with their acts, but simply give the inhabitants the power of appeal against any violent exercise of power by these boards.

The exclusion of the metropolis, the ground of another attack, is certainly a weakness, but tells its own tale. London was not willingly excepted, and once get the present Bill passed, and the omission will speedily be remedied.

The proceedings of the City in respect of sanitary arrangements, form the subject of several communications to us, as we mentioned at starting. Some of our readers have seen in the daily papers, a copy of a letter addressed to Lord Ashley by the City Remembrancer, denying, as false and unfounded, certain charges made in a "Report of the Sub-Committee (Health of Towns' Association), on the answers returned to questions addressed to the principal towns of England and Wales." The sub-committee have issued a slashing reply to this letter, which, taking up the statement made by the corporation in 1847, that "the healthfulness of the city is not to be surpassed," puts together some startling evidence to the contrary. In conclusion, it asks this question of Lord Ashley, to whom it is also addressed:—

"But after all, my lord, the great issue which should be placed before you, on which this corporation should be tried, is their deliberate and constantly repeated and recent statement,

"A provincial paper, the *Hamshire Advertiser*, in an article objecting to interference with the local boards, mentions a fact which is no way strengthened by the view taken by it, namely, that 'the Southampton Improvement Board has borrowed the whole of the twenty-five thousand pounds it was empowered to raise, and it has not accomplished more than half of the work—that of the sewers—which a high authority, now in the town, Dr. Knox, has this week told them, so far as they have gone—a failure.'"

that 'the City of London, for health, cleanliness, effective drainage, lighting, and the supply of water to the inhabitants, cannot be surpassed.' Are these allegations true, or are they false? You yourself have visited the courts and alleys of the City of London, in which the poorer classes reside, and which are included in these unqualified assertions. Are these places provided with sewers and drains which do not emit offensive odours? Are they provided with an ample supply of water fit for the use of human beings? Are the lanes and alleys which you visited cleanly, or is cleanliness possible with the arrangements which you witnessed? Did the people whom you saw, the children and the adults, appear to you to be healthy, and did they express to you their satisfaction with the comforts afforded them by the city authorities? We beg leave to call upon your lordship as a witness to state the facts as you found them; and to take respecting them the course which, as a member of the Legislature, and with your sense of the duties belonging to that high office, you think the truth and the public interests, and especially the interests of our poorer brethren, require."

To which Lord Ashley gives the following decisive reply:—

"I have perambulated not a few of them in company with a medical gentleman, and I must unhesitatingly offer my emphatic and deliberate testimony, that the language and description of the letter you have just addressed to me, fall short of the real abominations which are hourly endured by the wretched inhabitants of those courts and alleys."

It is affirmed, you say, by some of your opponents, that 'the City of London, for health, cleanliness, effective drainage, and the supply of water, cannot be surpassed.' It may be so: science may, possibly, have done its best in the metropolis of the British empire. Unlearned as I am in these matters, I do not presume to give an opinion on that head. But, if such be the case—if knowledge and zeal can do no more for the physical benefit of these masses of living beings, why, then it is evident that thousands upon thousands are inevitably doomed to a disgusting and hopeless degradation."

In the reply made by the sub-committee there are some personal observations in a bad tone, which disfigure the pamphlet, and might well have been omitted. We should not have alluded to it in the present instance, but that we observe a growing tendency amongst those whose views are now becoming predominant to indulge in this vein.

We have the same fault to find with a report by Mr. John Phillips on the "Report of the Committee of the Maylebone Vestry on the sanitary condition of the Parish;" the tone of which must be peculiarly unpleasant to the gentlemen forming that committee, who conscientiously and laboriously executed the duty which was confided to them. Some of the gentlemen who hold the now received opinions, for the early setting forth of which we could justify a claim to part of the merit, entertained different views on the same subjects only a few years ago, and should therefore view with forbearance, if not consideration, the conscientious opinions of others, even if erroneous.

In some cases, indeed, the comments are really unjust. For example, when we read in Mr. Phillips' observations,—"In regard to house drainage, they simply recognise the cleansing and emptying of foul and overflowing cesspools, and a more equitable and better supply and application of water. The general and entire abolition of those noxious and pestiferous receptacles is not deemed essential; and all reference to the important subject, of a complete arrangement and construction of a drain from every house, with an efficient water-closet, and a well-regulated, copious, and continuous supply of water thereto, as well as for the use of the inhabitants, is omitted, showing how little even the Sanitary Com-